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Subject: more to read and see and hear

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JH

Dear friends here is a text I found in the last Paris Review. I had to copy the text since its behind a paywall so I thought I could put some links to the things Eloghosa is referencing in the article. However it gave me the idea that I could include some links myself, links to associated pieces, films, poems etc. I'm very intrigued by this text and can't put the finger on what it is but the article titillate me and create images and associations (like the one I shared but also other things less tangible) or maybe the starts were just aligned in the right way?

I also want to thank you so much Quim for the previous stuff to read. Its embarrassing to admit but I was so late for the reading that your transfer link was already closed so I couldn't download Right On! but I have seen it and love it. And what a great story about the new language and the star props : )

Hope to see you soon again for drinks! Now that we can celebrate Paula (as if we needed an excuse...)

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My memory of my childhood is a black hole, save for the moments and ages marked by revelations and miracles. Take age six for instance, the year I learned to call things that are not (yet) as though they are (already.) It's a biblical lesson, this and much more...

mis, and my brothers were born from inside it, after years of waiting. Leaning on those words from the mouth of my mother, I prayed nightly for twin siblings, and soon started to talk about them like I knew them already. In a sense, I did. One, because they were real before their bodies were formed, and two, because my requests were already cool wax on the inside of God's ear. I was taught things about holding hope unswervingly, about manifesting with laser focus, and the veracity of those lessons raised the hairs on the back of my neck even when there was no one there. I sealed prayers with *amens* and had them delivered swiftly; fleshed wishes out in my heart that stumbled into my life, already breathing. The pattern begins in my first name, directly translated to mean "it is not hard for God to do." As in, nothing is. That name leads my head. My family took my dreams seriously, because God put the future behind my eyes often, but when the seeing got too heavy, I gave one of my many eyes back to God—the one that got visions, that put the weight of knowing on me—saying, This one is too much. Age thirteen, I believe, the year I learned that God understands consent, that They will never force anything on me for the sake of it.

[The spiritual controls the physical, so everything breathes there before it ever lands here.](#) I've never lost this lesson, which is also an inheritance, as in drooling through the genetic code. A gift, as in given freely. I did hide it though, so as not to look unhinged. For a long time, there was nothing I wanted more than to be normal, to be as a person should, to be young, to unknow things. [It still takes work to release the weight of normal, of should.](#)

Time isn't real, that's true, but years are time capsules in a sense. This year just gone shook the ground, took people in numbing numbers and cost some of us more than others, because nothing is equal. At points, I experienced consistent blocks of happiness, despite the world. A big part of that was made possible by safety and the privilege of a home with a roof and walls that disconnected me from nearly everything, but the other part was a dogged refusal to believe [the world I want to see isn't born yet](#). It is. That's not hope; it's faith, which Hebrews 11 defines as the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." Twenty-twenty turned me six again, treating stories like my life, the future like the present, the present like the past; stacking surreal on top of real, time on top of time. I don't know what it looks like from the outside. But it feels a lot like peace if you're wearing my skin.

[I've been wearing my skin.](#)

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[Tourmaline's essay last summer](#) taught me about freedom dreaming. The

concept itself wasn't new to me—I know the world I want to see: I've scattered its particulars across art mediums; unfurled it irreversibly from inside my life—but the name was, the intent was. As a child, I had plenty practice not just shrinking the world, but replacing it, too. When there was chaos outside the house, I turned our home into a world. When there was shouting outside my room, I turned my room into Mars. When there was a heaving abomination in my bed, I turned my senses into the universe. I could deaden the rest of existence on cue, unreal everything but the chords in a song or the pages of a book or the colors in a painting. I could tumble out of the world at will, sit beside myself and hold my little holy hand. It was called absent-mindedness by surrounding adults. They were wrong about that. I was only breathing. Only freedom dreaming. Only making my now-present life.

I've always experienced time through what I now refer to as the timestack. Future on the past on the present. Ice, water, gas—all a matter of matter, depending. But last year, time happened inside Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory*: hot iron melting on concrete, minutes leaking into the ground, the hands of time frozen in the faces of three clocks. Wasn't that the first lesson that we all learned when the world shut down in March? Time is not real, urgency is fiction, whatever we've been told must be done right now can wait. We were all surprised. But I did spend some time noticing what people were surprised by. It was all different things. Some people were surprised by the fact that the world could stop; others by the fact that the world is cruel and governments are merciless; others by how little control they actually had; some by how ruthlessly death could sweep through a world that's expected to keep spinning. I'd learned some of these things the hard way and it didn't just break my mind, it ended the world for me, so I don't blame anyone who shattered under the weight. It's just—it's not the first time. The roots of right now have wildly consistent roots.

Standing at the edge of 2019, facing last year, I had resolved to let myself eat joy. I'd already died enough and I owed myself the stillness I'd gathered, the peace I'd reaped. When the year started to unfold, a friend and I talked about how we weren't mind-blown by any of the violence per se, just by the staggering scale; by the world's resilience and consistent bounce back (what will be enough to make it stop?); just by the fact that the younger versions of us who had been scolded for preferring stories to real life had been right all along about reality being bendable.

I think we're all seeing the need for reinvention, for newness, for a new world, but how do we get there? What I keep telling myself and everyone I love is that the world before this pause was imagined. The world we will have after is currently being imagined. We are all part of that work. It's a message I hope we

keep passing on and on and on, because it has sturdy composition, is made out of way more than thin air. I know from my own personal life that there's a jarring quake that comes with losing the lens through which you've always seen the world. It's a heartbreak. A loss. Only, not of a person; of the entire way you understand seeing. There's a scintillating quiet that follows. You can't turn or run from it; you *have to* make something else, or it'll be made for you. It's up to you, says the glowing instruction, choose the life and lens you can survive.

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This is one of the most liberating adult lessons, isn't it: that point when you see that everything that was insisted upon, passed down to you as an inflexible rule, was made up. For me, in real time, learning this looked like hacking my own past to find me at five, seven, ten years old. As always, upside down in a song, backflipping into a painting, teleporting into a film, gathering my pieces one by one—especially the ones I'd been told made me too strange for the world. I've been growing younger on purpose because I have the most to teach me about how to keep alive in the wake of an evaporating reality, how to make edible joy from scratch, how to make friends inside a doll house, a vacation out of a train set, a safe house out of Lego blocks. A younger me has things to teach me about faith, about believing the yet unseen. I've been sitting next to her a lot.

I told her a secret recently. I told her that sometimes I worry adulthood is a long process of making un stomachable things liveable-with in order to keep being okay, because those mental not-okays? Loneliest place in the body, loneliest place in the world. I told her that there have been days when my own resilience disgusted me to the point of tears; that I don't always understand what's happening around me or how people keep going but I do the smile and laugh anyway because it works.

She had things to tell me about history. "It's flat and boring and I don't trust it," she said. "I prefer storybooks. They're more real."

I agree with her. They're more real. Aren't the most dangerous facts just stories no one will ever tell you the real moral of?

I don't hide darkness from her because she knows about it, so I told her things about watching the Nigerian government's hand strike out people's names from an event we all saw; how they gaslit us so bad we had to tell each other repeatedly: We saw that, it happened. And that sometimes we doubted our own eyes, our voices shaking with unbelief. I told her that they shot people and lied about it; that during protests, people who were fighting for justice tried to erase

others because they didn't like how they looked or how they loved; that I saw the largest congregation of hope Nigeria has seen since independence and then watched the government scatter it with bullets.

Her eyes watered. She asked, "Why would they do that? Don't these people think? They never know what they're doing!"

I told her it's become louder than ever that they *do* think, that they know exactly what they're doing and why. Even disasters have design. I told her I distrust history now more than ever, because how much of it has always been gaslighting and ruthless curating? How much of what we believe was decided for us? [I explained to her that we are always living in each other's collective imagination.](#) We can only be free to the extent to which we, or people who love us, can see.

When I asked what she was reading, she told me Malorie Blackman. She asked what I've been up to, what we ended up becoming, if she would really be needing maths, if we did everything on time. I told her to forget the math and hold on to the stories, that there are no clocks in my house, that we live a life where we get to move by the senses—rain sounds in the bedroom all through harmattan, night on repeat between the walls while the sun hangs high outside. I told her that when I couldn't see my way into the life I wanted, I wrote it down, I vision-boarded it using photographs and films and paintings like she taught me. Her mouth slackened as I told her how many hours I spent looking at [Manuja Waldia's](#) paintings three years ago when I lost my head, because the paintings showed me beautiful people around a stunning table, all fed and loved and chosen and happy—that's what I had needed the most. I told her that in my home, in the space where I live, I have that dining table now; that it became real because I saw it in color; that it took me a long time to accept our inability to tell the difference, but that she was right, the table inside a painting is as real as the table inside your house. I told her that sometimes I can see her running through Paul Davey's universes showing girls like her in the thick of glorious adventures, and that really, truly, what makes all of this freedom dreaming worth it is that we are not the first or only. We're part of an ever-growing congregation of people who see better with us, whose dreaming touches our dreaming, whose doing touches our doing.

The day slides off and I show her the girls in [Ojima Abalaka's](#) illustrations and how worthy they look just resting. Then we spend hours dancing to Afrobeats inside Lynette [Yiadom-Boakye's The Hours behind You](#) painting. She dances, and so do I, in dizzying circles.

“Is this real?” she asks, sweat leaking onto the back of our matching white dresses, even though outside this work I hardly wear dresses and only wear black.

“Reality is plasticine,” I tell her. “Nothing is real. Everything is real. We can go everywhere.”

“Now you think about this question instead and answer: What is freedom?”

She pauses to take it in. “This?” she answers, finally.

[“This,” I say.](#)

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What’s there to do with the surreality of everything? Who knows. Sometimes, I come up for air in the middle of a month I can’t recall and there is an expanse on either side: time like an endless body of water, wave after wave after wave. The more stillness is required of us—the more my schedule bends like hot rubber, the more silence fills the space between my ears, the higher the numbers and warnings and unrelenting griefs—the less and more sure I am about where the shore of my self is. Sometimes my couch levitates and I’m suddenly on a cloud at two in the afternoon. Sometimes I don’t use my voice for long enough to forget I ever had one. There is so much to feel I need to sort through my own head to find what’s mine. But maybe the places I go are what’s mine. Maybe my thousand unrealities and addresses are what’s mine. Maybe my unrootedness is what’s mine. The truth is: to survive the world and what it does, I do not live in it. I live inside the apartment I love, which might as well be anywhere, inside the love I’m choosing, inside God, inside art, inside music, behind the motherboard in my phone, trying to keep in touch across distance despite my own exhaustion. Everything is fiction. That fact shifted the floor from under me before it showed me the *and*: everything is fiction *and* all of my fictions can be made tangible. It all already exists. Love for myself is protecting my imagination from their facts and their set-in-stone. It’s protecting my world from the world, feeding it fat with faith, giving it my trust for dessert. All I know for sure these days is this: Nothing is real. Everything is real. We can go *anywhere*.

[Eloghosa Osunde](#) is a writer and visual artist. Her debut work of fiction will be published by Riverhead Books in 2021.

